



Public Transit Recommendations
Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth
Youth Advisory Subcommittee

*Youth Commissioners: Itamar Fiorino, Victoria Koretsky, Talia Nesin, and
Ashley Thommana*

May 2019

RECOMMENDATION #1:**Expansion of the Kids Ride Free program to provide ample commute opportunities that serve youth for school, work, and extracurriculars.**

During the 2018-2019 year, the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth (CCY) Youth Advisory subcommittee recognized areas of improvements in the systems of public transportation made available to MCPS youth. Consequently, the subcommittee initiated several methods to gauge public support for extended transport times: both in the form of specifically tailored roundtable questions and a county-wide public transport survey.

On February 7, 2019, the Youth Commission held the 12th annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable at the Silver Spring Civic Building, with over 50 middle and high school youth across the county in attendance. At the event, the Commission collected testimonials involving public transit use and concluded that restrictions in the current Kids Ride Free Program are detrimental to youth interests—youth who often rely on public transportation as a means of commute outside of Kids Ride Free schedules and locations. The Commission also posited that bus drivers are frequently unfamiliar with the specifics of these programs, with multiple students sharing stories of being denied free ridership during program times.

In addition to the annual roundtable discussion, over 300 MCPS students took the Commission on Children and Youth's voluntary county-wide survey on the subject of public transport availability to students. The results were clear; a 24/7 Kids Ride Free service schedule would substantially bolster use of busing systems, increasing the trust instilled in students at a young age and combating the primacy of the automobile in our culture. The survey showed that those who apply for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMs) consistently use more public transit than the general youth. For example, 44% of subjects not explicitly eligible for FARMs said that they would extensively use public transportation on weekends and holidays, compared to the 65% of FARM-eligible students.

Based on this research, the Commission submits the following recommendations:

- a. Implement a 24/7 extension of Kids Ride Free services that allow free ridership given proper identification.
- b. Conduct a comprehensive long-term cost projection analysis of Kids Ride Free options considering the effects of increased ridership—presumably across the board—and environmental savings.
- c. Perform ubiquitous route-restructuring and optimization that benefits underrepresented or highly active communities with regards to public transportation.
- d. Provide specialized and consistent training to bus drivers regarding youth riding privileges.

RECOMMENDATION #2:
Streamlining the Youth Cruiser SmarTrip Card system.

Youth Cruiser SmarTrip is a system that “provides free rides on County Ride On buses and certain Metrobus routes within Montgomery County to kids ages 18 and under.” Youth Cruiser SmarTrip includes various plans that are substantially more affordable than regular fares.

At the annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, the Commission on Children and Youth found that a mere 4 out of over 50 kids were familiar with the Youth Cruiser SmarTrip Card. Additionally, the survey showed that 73% were completely unaware of Youth Cruiser SmarTrip services. The Commission determined that this was due to the unclear information online and the lack of public awareness. Since the county is investing funds in the program, publicity is essential to youth accessibility and utilization of this system.

Based on this research, the Commission submits the following recommendations:

- a. Modify the website to offer succinct and clear information to students about their bus riding privileges.
- b. Make Youth Cruiser SmarTrip Cards easily available at a greater number of public schools across the county.
- c. Publicize the relevant services to the interested parties, including information on school websites.